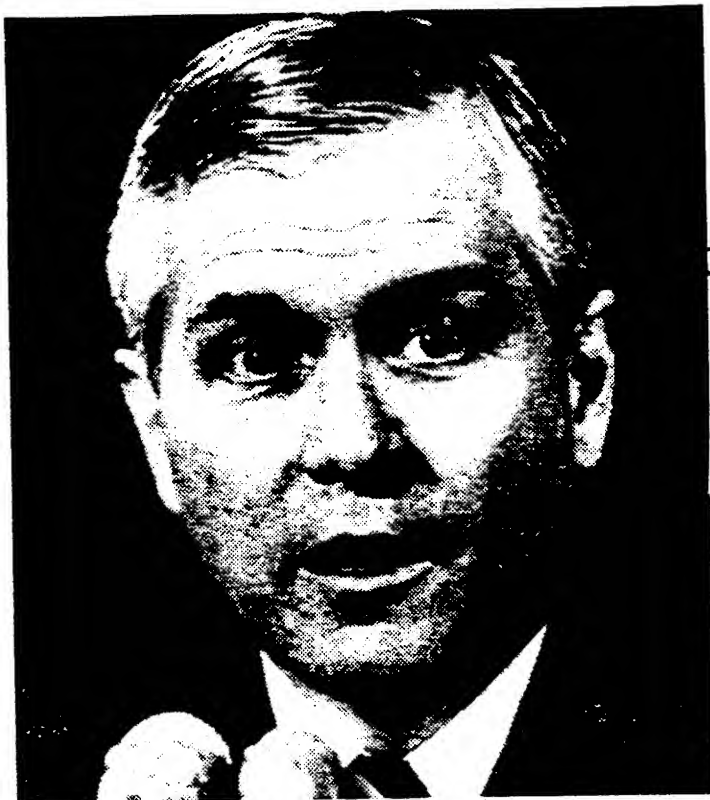


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# A touch of flimsy



**DID HE OR DIDN'T HE?** CIA Director-designate Robert Gates testifies before Senate Intelligence Committee about his advance knowledge of the Iran-Contra scandal.

## Gates: I knew early, but . . .

By JOSEPH VOLZ

News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Robert Gates, President Reagan's nominee to head the CIA, said yesterday that he learned about a possible Iran-Contra arms connection two months before the scandal became public but didn't tell Congress because his information was "extraordinarily flimsy."

In fact, Gates, 43, and the No. 2 man at the CIA, claimed in a day of grilling before the Senate Intelligence Committee that he had very little solid information about the whole matter because Iran and the Contras were pet projects of former CIA Director William Casey. Casey, recovering from the brain tumor surgery that forced him to resign, was too ill to testify.

Gates, a career CIA official who would be the youngest man ever to head the nation's chief spy agency, appeared to be trying to put some distance between himself and his former boss, who had enraged Intelligence Committee members, including New York's Daniel Patrick Moynihan, for keeping Congress in the dark about covert CIA actions.

### Mending fences

In an effort to pacify angry members of the committee who complained they had been deliberately ignored by Casey, Gates admitted: "The long period of withholding went beyond the bounds . . . stretching the comity between the two branches (executive and Congress) to the breaking point."

He insisted that he would press in the future to tell Congress in advance of CIA covert operations "except in the most extraordinary circumstances."

In those cases, Gates said Congress should then be told in a few days and that he would consider resigning if the President objected to such disclosure.

### Informal agreement

Gates' comments about the Iran-Contra scheme showed that despite his contention he had an "informal" agreement which put the plan under Casey's control, he did have key information about the subject last Oct. 1, less than two months before Attorney General Edwin Meese revealed the operation to the rest of the country.

Gates said he was concerned about asking questions at the time because Congress had strictly limited CIA involvement with the Contras.

Said Gates yesterday: "I considered in October and November, and even today, that it would have been irresponsible to report to these bodies the flimsy speculation."